1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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pride in the number of my followers in comparison with those of other nations". If sons and daughters behave uprightly they will act as a means of redeeming the parents' sin. Any good action by the child, e.g. giving alms, helping the weak, digging a well, would also benefit the parents. Parents who have left unworthy children have left "dust" behind.'

My informant went on to say: 'Children are the glory of this world, as the Koran says "Money and children are the joy of this life". Another statement of the Koran says: "God give us a good thing in this world and a good thing in the next world". The Koran interpreters consider that, in this context, "the good thing of this world" implies children. Children are also referred to as sowing seeds, as it is through these seeds that the corn reproduces itself.'

As for the wife, she attains her proper status only as a mother, and a childless woman is in an insecure position, as her husband is socially justified in remarrying, to have children. For a newly-married couple to have a child is a step towards partaking of some individuality in the larger family circle. The wife is referred to as 'mother of the children' and whenever a man is asked about his wife, she is frequently referred to also as the 'mother of the first-born boy' and the same applies also to the father, and this reference is more common in public gatherings.

My informant, Mahmoud, told me that there were ten childless women in the village and that they were therefore known by everybody. Out of these ten, two were living with husbands who had taken a second wife. He continued, 'A childless woman is usually like a she-camel who does not conceive, puts on more and more flesh, and gets younger every day—but not fruitful, as she can never "lengthen" her husband's neck amongst the menfolk. She is a sore eye to her family. The proper woman is the one who is an "envelope for conception".' It is not strange, then, that a fat woman is a desirable ideal, as she has more room to bear the child, lactates abundantly and gives more warmth to her children.

It is appropriate here to discuss the differential value of boys and girls in Silwa. The importance of the boys' work in the fields as a major contribution to the family's means of subsistence was discussed earlier. Moreover, the boys are considered to be the best capital investment for ageing parents. They are expected to form the basis for social and economic security, not only for their parents, but also for any widowed sisters. This duty to support their parents or those female relatives who have no other man to support them is legally enforced by the religious courts. This question gives rise to endless disputes; one hears of parents suing their children for support according to their means, or at least threatening to sue them. No such obligations devolve on the daughters, as they are wives of their husbands, and no claim can be made against them.

Boys are also an added qualification for social prestige. A man with more sons backing him up can always speak with more authority and ranks high in the community's esteem even if he owns less land. Fathers who have